

Guiding Principles for King County Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP) Update – DRAFT for RWQC Discussion

I. Purpose and background

The existing Regional Wastewater Services Plan (RWSP) and the associated policies in King County Code (KCC) 28.84 (Water Pollution Abatement) and 28.86 (Wastewater Treatment) do not reflect current or future needs. The policies and plan must be updated to guide investments in the wastewater system to improve water quality, ensure system performance, and effectively manage the cost of service over the long term. King County needs a vision and plan for how to make wastewater investments that reflects the values and priorities of people who live, work, and play in the region and who pay for the system.

The purpose of this document is to establish a set of principles that will guide the process to update the RWSP and associated policies, KCC 28.84 and 28.86. These principles will help ensure that King County updates the RWSP in a collaborative and responsive way to guide WTD's future investments for decades. These updates will support a regional wastewater system that delivers high-quality services for an increasing population, provides an equitable framework for managing sewer rates, meets compliance requirements, and is resilient to climate change and other disruptions.

King County Wastewater Treatment Division (WTD) developed these guiding principles in consultation with the Regional Water Quality Committee (RWQC) as well as feedback from component agencies and interested parties during the Clean Water Plan outreach process.

II. Guiding principles for the process to update the RWSP and associated policies

1. **Work collaboratively to establish clear and transparent processes, roles, and decision-making responsibilities and authority.** The RWSP update process will establish and clearly communicate roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority for all steps of the process. Roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. *RWQC* will review and provide input on proposed RWSP policy changes and provide recommendations on policy amendments to the County Council.
 - b. *MWPAAC* will review technical analyses, provide feedback on WTD work products, and develop technical recommendations for the Executive, WTD, and RWQC consideration.
 - c. *WTD* will lead the RWSP Update planning effort, using these guiding principles and input from stakeholders to develop a vision, policies, and a plan to guide the future of the Division.
 - d. *The King County Executive* will recommend the vision, policies, and plan.
 - e. *Other interested parties* will provide input to inform the planning process. The planning process will involve key regional audiences to ensure that the WTD can develop an RWSP that reflects regional values and priorities.
2. **Ensure inclusivity in the process.** The process will center equity and social justice (ESJ), engaging and incorporating input from a range of audiences. These audiences will include, but not be limited to, community members (especially those not traditionally included in wastewater policy planning), Tribal organizations, regulatory agencies, component agencies, community-based

organizations, and non-governmental organizations including environmental groups. Equitable engagement strategies, such as culturally relevant translations and accessible meetings, will be used to remove barriers to participation and allow decisionmakers to hear from underrepresented voices.

3. **Listen and respect input, ideas, and feedback from all participants.** The process will engage interested parties who participated in the Clean Water Plan outreach process, as well as those who are new to this effort, and meaningfully reflect their input in the vision and plan. WTD will solicit community perspectives on the challenges, opportunities, and high-level goals for the future of the wastewater system and will report back on how community feedback is considered and used.
4. **Understand the challenges and opportunities facing the regional wastewater system.** The process will develop a shared understanding of the key challenges or “drivers” for the planning process and the opportunities or range of possible future directions for the regional wastewater system over the next 50 years. Having this common understanding will be an important foundation for developing a vision and by itself could inform the wastewater planning efforts of WTD and component agencies.
5. **Develop a shared vision for the future.** The process will engage regional audiences to develop a vision and high-level goals for wastewater services in the region. This vision will articulate the “next generation” of wastewater treatment to 2075. Although directly addressing wastewater, the vision will consider complementary parts of the water cycle (water supply, stormwater, etc.).
6. **Develop policy updates and a plan that aligns with the vision.** Guided by the vision and high-level goals, WTD will develop, evaluate, and select strategies that will guide WTD's investments into the future and provide an equitable path forward for managing the cost of service. WTD will collaborate with RWQC to review and refine policies and will collaborate with MWPAAC on technical analyses in support of policy updates. WTD will also engage with the public and interested parties to collect feedback on the draft plan and ensure that proposed strategies are aligned with the high-level regional vision.

III. Principles to guide the content and substance of the RWSP update

1. **Focus on wastewater services.** The RWSP update will focus on wastewater system issues and policies, informed by the context of related water policies, actions, and outcomes. King County WTD will coordinate with other water-focused programs to ensure that the vision, policies, and plan incorporate an understanding of the relationship of the RWSP and non-wastewater investments.
2. **Commit to meet regulatory obligations.** The RWSP update will be developed to meet current and anticipated future regulatory obligations.
3. **Protect and promote equity and social justice.** The RWSP update will improve equity and social justice outcomes, including ensuring that the benefits and burdens of wastewater system investments are distributed equitably. It also will support King County's Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan through pro-equity policies, systems, and practices for the wastewater system.
4. **Balance system needs and affordability.** The RWSP update will establish clear steps to manage the cost of service and the impact on sewer rates in the region. It will also present an analysis of

cost and rate projections to support this. King County WTD will work to address affordability challenges, including by pursuing alternative programs.

5. **Protect and improve public health and the environment.** The RWSP update will ensure the protection and improvement of Puget Sound and related water quality needs, which will help to support community health as well as ecological resources for future generations.

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